

# Understand Sri Lanka

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Controversy surrounds Sri Lanka and its government, even as tourist numbers increase.

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This small nation has a lot of history, as evidenced by its eight Unesco World Heritage Sites.

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Progress comes at a price for an island with so many unique species – and so many elephants!

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It's an incredibly diverse crowd of more than 20 million people.

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The island's most famous export is beautiful to behold and delicious to drink.

# Sri Lanka Today

**Tourists continue to pour into Sri Lanka in ever greater numbers. But even as the physical and economic consequences of the long war recede, the country is embroiled by the international attention focused on its president, Mahinda Rajapaksa.**

## Best in Print

**On Sal Mal Lane** Ru Freeman weaves together the many strands of Sri Lankan society in a beautiful novel set down a Colombo lane.

**Running in the Family** A comic and reflective memoir by Michael Ondaatje of his Colombo family in the 1940s.

**Monkfish Moon** Nine short stories, by Booker Prize-nominated Romesh Gunsekera, provide a diverse glimpse of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

**Wave** A searing memoir by Sonali Deraniyagala opens on the morning of 26 December 2004, right before the tsunami kills her husband, children and parents.

## Human Rights Groups

**Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice** ([www.srilankacampaign.org](http://www.srilankacampaign.org)) A global nonpartisan movement calling for humanitarian relief, an end to human rights abuses and a repeal of the government's anti-terror regulations.

**Human Rights Watch** ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)) Researches and publishes regular reports about human rights conditions in Sri Lanka.

## Investigations Resisted

Sri Lanka is likely to be dogged by allegations about its behaviour during the long civil war for years to come – at least as long as the current government rejects calls for an investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). It is generally agreed that human rights abuses were committed by all sides in the final months of the 26-year war, which ended in May 2009. But the contention that the Sri Lankan military killed 40,000 Tamil civilians in its final push to victory simply won't go away. Two documentaries, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields: War Crimes Unpunished* and *No Fire Zone: In the Killing Fields of Sri Lanka*, by the UK's Channel 4 have stoked calls for investigations. A report by the UNHRC says that there is enough evidence of civilian slaughter to require a full investigation.

The Sri Lankan government, led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, has denied human rights abuses and fought against any official investigation. It's a strategy that has kept the issue in the headlines internationally. The 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting should have been a triumph for Rajapaksa; instead, there was intense pressure on governments to boycott the meeting and Canada, India and Mauritius refused to attend.

In 2014 Sri Lanka's parliament formally rejected any investigation by the Sri Lankan government or the UN, although the vote was not overwhelming. Meanwhile, human rights groups worldwide seem determined to keep the matter alive and the UN regularly votes for investigations.

## Omnipresent President

You can't avoid him: the grinning face of President Mahinda Rajapaksa is everywhere in Sri Lanka. He gazes